Place Identity and Participatory Planning

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1 Introduction

Urbanization is currently rapid and many cities are facing acute population growth, often accompanied with unequal socio-economic development. As a result of the urban development a new group of people has emerged in developing countries; the urban poor, not able to afford decent accommodation, education or healthcare. The amount of people living in slum areas is growing rapidly, followed by a fragmentation in the provision of infrastructure and services in urban development (Drakakis-Smith, 2000: 53 and 154, Jenkins, et al., 2007:152).

This paper aims to discuss place identity and the importance of community participation in urban planning. According to UN-Habitat the success of slum-upgrading projects depend on two fundamental aspects; the quality of the organization and management of the project as well as the "level of participation and involvement of the residents in project formulation and implementation" (UN-Habitat 2014:97).

A place can have meaning in the form of emotional bonds that people experience in different environments and most people define themselves at least partly through identification with the place they inhabit. Kirk (2005:139) argues that planning for place identity is "a process of constructing a discourse within which specific place narratives are written". However, questions remain, who is constructing these narratives of place and are the discourse structures exclusionary of some voices and meanings of place (Smith, 2005:39)?

There is no doubt that the built environment plays an important role in relation to place identity, hence the focus of this paper. Due to changes in the world such as urbanization, migration and globalization, there might be a loss of *sense of place*. The concept of *placelessness* describes these diminishing bonds of attachments to place (Foote and Azaryahu, 2009:96-100; Taylor, 2009:296-297). This adds to the complications but also the possibilities for the urban planner. Hans Schmidt (2002:2) concludes the consequences of globalisation as follows,

> "The challenge for the future is to determine how this force can pull with it an entire region without compromising our identity. In other words we must remain locally anchored in a changing global world."

2 Literature Review

This paper is built on different theoretical concepts. Through the literature review I discuss concepts such as place identity and belonging, their relation to urban planning and participation, and the importance of accounting for these while planning cities. In the last section I also introduce Arnstein's Ladder of Participation to give a good basis for the following guidelines for participatory planning in chapter 3.

2.1 The importance of place identity

People tend to define or identify themselves through some sort of devotion to place. Peoples' interaction with place contributes to its meaning and value. Hence, space becomes place when it is used and inhabited. (Taylor, 2009:296-297; Cresswell, 2009:169-170). Or, in Edward Relph's words, a place is "those fragments of human environments where meanings, activities and a specific landscape are all implicated and enfolded by each other" (Relph, 1976:37). The meanings of place can be individual or shared. Shared experiences of a place are important and can generate feelings of belonging and sense of community (Foote and Azaryahu, 2009:97).

Since places are important both as sources of security and identity it is of significance for people to experience meaningful places. At the same time mobility is increasing in today's society, thus a key aspect of understanding place is through its relation to mobility. According to Relph and his concept of *placelessness* there might be a decrease of diverse landscapes and meaningful places. This indicates the possibility of a *placeless geography* and a loss of sense of place (Relph, 1976:6 and 79; Cresswell 2009:174-175).

Placelessness in Relph's words is "the casual eradication of distinctive places and the making of standardized landscapes that results from an insensitivity to the significance of place" (Relph, 2008 (1976):preface). According to Relph *placelessness* is increasing as a result of "the weakening of distinct and diverse experience and identities of places" (Relph, 1976:6). *Placelessness* was conceptualized in 1976 and in later writings the meaning of the concept has changed; increased mobility is now emphasized as one of the main reasons (Relph, 2008 (1976):preface).

The concepts of *insideness* and *outsideness* are significant in order to get an understanding of the importance of place identity. The concepts have a focus on

how people experience place. According to Relph, "to be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is this identity with the place". In other words, *insideness* defines the degree of belonging and sense of community a person experience in relation to place (Relph, 1976:49). Whereas *outsideness* describes experiences of detachment, separation or some form of division between the self and the place. Hence, places can hold various meanings as a result of people experiencing more or less *insideness*. (Seamon, 1996:2; Seamon 2008:3-4).

Ann-Dorte Christensen problematizes these concepts further when she argues that there is a close interplay between constructions of *belonging* and *unbeloning*. The construction of *who belongs* is accompanied and generates the construction of *who does not belong* (Christensen, 2009:26). Koefoed and Simonsen make a similar suggestion when they argue that "places in the meaning of loci or community generally have a dual character: they are social communities where residents communicate and do things together and they are bounded areas seeking to enforce the boundaries against those who do not belong" (2011:354). They continue on the same line when they argue; "identity becomes a question of the construction of symbolic boundaries, of the way in which every identity has a constitutive outside" (2011:354). On the other hand they emphasize that the question is not how to remove *strangers,* rather how to live side by side (2011:354).

In relation to this Ayona Datta (2011) argues that openness to *others* is produced in order to create feelings of belonging in an otherwise exclusionary environment. In her study of a squatter settlement in Delhi, India she proposes that what she refers to as *cosmopolitan neighbourliness* is created. Values and beliefs about *the others* are transformed and differences become normalized in order to produce an alternative home in an exclusionary city (Datta, 2011:1, 3-4 and 19). Or in Datta's words; "during the struggles to survive in an exclusionary urban public sphere, it is in the neighbourhood sphere that other differences beyond class become meaningful. And it is in the neighbourhood sphere, outside the gaze of the city, that a cosmopolitan neighbourliness is produced" (Datta, 2011:9). She argues that the slum is constructed by participants and is "a place where bridging across differences of caste, religion, ethnicity and language is an ordinary aspect of everyday life" (Datta, 2011:19).

2.2 Place identity in relation to urban planning

Cliff Hague argues, in relation to Relph's discussion, that place implies a mix of memory and interpretation. In turn, it is interpretation and narrative that creates identity and it is identity that transforms space into place. Hague argues that it is not surprising that words like *character* and *identity* are commonly used among planners. On the other hand, he argues that there is a presumption that place is defined mainly through its visual qualities and that underlying meanings are rarely decoded (2005:4-5).

People might have varying meanings and identities in relation to the place they inhabit; there will be multiple and contested identities within the same area. The key questions concern how spatial planning can construct, integrate or exclude these identities. Hague argues that there is a gap between planner's narratives of sustainable development and the lifestyle and living choices of ordinary people. (Hague, 2005:8 and 12). He continues the same argument by stating that it is everyday life that "sets the structures within which place communities are imagined, experienced and changed" (2005:11). Hague points out a need for a dialogue between the elite and the public in order to fill the gap between the planner's narratives and those of the people. (Hague, 2005:8 and 12). Similar to this Groth argues that the construction of urban identities must be formed in a broad partnership-dialogue with the citizens and social movements (Groth, 2002:19).

This implies that participation is important, but the term 'dialogue' is vague. I argue that a dialogue in this sense should be seen as a tool to engage the community in participation and decision-making. In relation to this, Hague emphasizes the importance of a planner's ability to engage local residents in the process, hence promoting public participation (Hague, 2005:8 and 12). I would like to summarize this section with a concluding quote by Hague,

> "The essence of planning is the presumption that deliberate 'top-down' action can translate a desired place identity into an actual place identity, but the reality is that a myriad of actions of others, the normal practice of everyday life in the city, will subvert such intentions" (Hague, 2005: 11-12).

2.3 Arnstein's Ladder of Participation

The above review points at the need for participatory planning. An early contribution to the discussion on participation was Arnstein's *ladder of participation* (1969). The ladder characterized different levels of 'devolution', i.e. degrees of delegation of power to citizens. It ranges from manipulation at the bottom to citizen control at the top. Or in other words, it ranges from participation as a means of manipulating public opinion, to participation where citizens are in control of decisions (see figure 1).
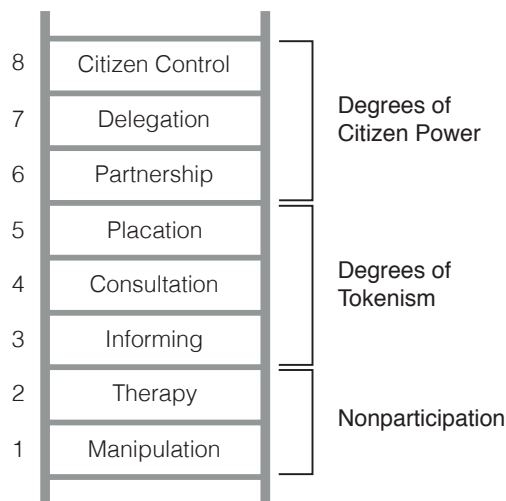

8	Citizen Control	Degrees of
7	Delegation	Citizen Power
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	Degrees of
4	Consultation	Tokenism
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	Nonparticipation
1	Manipulation	

Figure 1: Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969)

Arnstein (1969) stated that most of the cases of implemented participation she studied were in fact not at the top of the ladder. They did not involve redistribution of power, and therefore the existing issues remained.

3 Guidelines for participatory planning

Before implementation of a project it is important to develop a communication strategy, including feedback systems between various actors and the local residents (UN-habitat, 2014:92). It is vital that the role of the community will not be underrated. In a discussion on slum upgrading strategies led by Slum Dwellers International (SDI), Joseph Kimani (2013) states that it is possible for professionals and governments to "allow the slum upgrading process to be led by the slum dwellers while we journey with them in the process".

The UN-Habitat guidelines for slum-upgrading projects states that the project needs to be explained and discussed; residents should be given the possibility to apply to different components of the project as well as be informed and prepared for participation in the upgrading or construction of their neighbourhood. UN-Habitat states that, "the project will be implemented according to certain procedures, processes, rules and regulation and all these need to be explained. Residents need to know what is expected of them but also what their rights are" (UN-habitat, 2014:92). I argue that such a strategy – initially explaining the project and preparing people for participation – has top-down planning influences. Instead, in line with Kimani (2013), I emphasize that the best strategy is to allow the process to be led by the community. In this sense the process regards not merely including the community in participation for the sake of it, rather a commitment that requires people to be in the centre of their own development (Kimani, 2013).

There are several communication methods to consider. Among these are consultations, community assemblies, meetings, focus group discussion, workshops, TV, radio and newspapers, posters, flyers and booklets, events, Internet and social media (UN-Habitat 2014:93). In relation to Arnstein's ladder, some of the above methods are merely informative and could be resembled with the middle part of the ladder, hence could be considered plagued by degrees of tokenism. I argue the importance of the communication to involve the community, not only to inform it. For example, the community can conduct data collection with methods such as mapping, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and surveys. In line with this, SDI uses community-led data collection as a main tool in order to put the people in the centre of the development. They state that,

> "The power of communities and their ability to gather data that can influence policy is immense: The urban poor have demonstrated that cities have to work with urban poor communities to collect data and maps of all informal settlements in the city, as the basis for inclusive partnerships between communities of the urban poor and local governments" (Muungano wa Wanavijiji documentation Team, SDI, 2015).

Community-led data collection has proven to be a vital starting point for successful development interventions. It has benefits in relation to conventional techniques; it provides greater acceptability among residents being interviewed, a better understanding of the local situation and the data may be considered more legitimate by residents (Muungano wa Wanavijiji documentation Team, SDI, 2015; UN-Habitat 2014:104).

According to UN-Habitat, a project manager and management teams should by the time of implementation of a project be identified to coordinate between residents, utility companies and governments (UN-Habitat 2014:97). In the implementation process various manuals and guidelines will be needed in order to involve residents in decision-making and thus give the community control and power in the project. For example, location of private and public spaces should be discussed with residents during the planning process (UN-Habitat 2014:98 and 108). This could be seen as a bit vague and it is unclear how much power the community will have in the process. Are the management teams from outside the community and is the control and power of the project "given" to the community by external actors? If so, this could have the result of excluding the community from the process. SDI argues that despite that participation has been prioritized by development agencies; few options have been given the communities to develop their own alternatives (Muungano wa Wanavijiji documentation Team, SDI, 2015).

As discussed previously, to achieve meaningful participation, people should be in the centre of their own development and lead the process (Kimani, 2013). In order to not exclude the community from the process, but instead empower people, SDI uses tools for community organization such as previously discussed community-led data collection. Other tools include for example mapping, women-led daily savings and learning exchanges from one community to another. These are all starting-points in order for the community to "build political voice that can strike advantageous deals with formal actors to upgrade informal settlements" (Benjamin Bradlow, SDI secretariat, 2012; SDI, 2016).

SDI federations can, according to themselves, not address informal settlement challenges by their self. They state that a key to reaching community driven development is through the involvement of external partners such as governments, international organisations, academics and other institutions. The aim is "to create situations in which the urban poor are able to play a central role in *co-producing* access to land, services, and housing" (SDI, 2016). In relation to this I argue for a *partnership* between the residents and the other stakeholders where the power and decisions should be levelled between all parties.

According to both UN-habitat and SDI relocation should be minimal and only proposed when other options are not to be found. If relocation is not done correctly it can have serious impacts on relocated households. In situations where relocation is unavoidable it should be carefully negotiated and voluntary; decisions must be made in conjunction with the community so that the residents find the move acceptable (UN-Habitat 2014:106; SDI, 2016). In other words; "this means a site must be identified which is not considered too far from (existing) sources of employment or social networks" (UN-Habitat 2014:107).

When it comes to upgrading of houses the residents should largely manage housing improvements. Residents relocated to new sites can in some cases do construction themselves. In either way it is beneficial to advice on possible progressive housing options, "where possible these should be varied to allow for the different investment possibilities and household characteristics involved" (UN-Habitat 2014:109). It is important to provide technical support to residents and organizations. Advice and training should be available regarding regulations, material options and construction skills. Many self-builders will not be able to construct the more complicated parts, such as foundation and roof, and assistance for this is acquired. Thus, inputs from for example architects, engineers and planners are necessary (UN-Habitat 2014:107 and 109).

4 Discussion

As argued in the literature review place identity is vital for feelings of belonging and a sense of community. Key questions raised by Hague concern how spatial planning can construct, integrate or exclude identities (Hague, 2005:8 and 12). In order to include the various meanings and relations to place different residents may have, I argue participation as the best solution. It is in this way that all interest can be combined; when people are participating they are creating shared narratives and thus creating a sense of community.

During site visits in various low-income housing projects in Manila, Philippines, the lack of participatory processes, and the consequences of this, were clear in some areas. Many residents did not know each other; they felt unsafe and did not care much about outdoor areas. On the other hand, the success of participatory planning was noticeable in others areas, such as Manggahan. In this chapter I will strengthen my argument with observations made in this area. I mainly rely on one source of reference, an interview that for me exemplifies the importance of participation. It should be noted that this is not the base for a broad empirical generalisation, rather an example to support my argument.

During the interview with one of the residents in Manggahan, it became clear that participatory elements had been vital for the success of the area. The resident interviewed, Michelle, had been relocated to the area ten months earlier. As mentioned in the "guidelines", relocation should be minimal and only proposed as a last solution when no other options are to be found (UN-Habitat 2014:106; SDI, 2016). In Michelle's case the new site would have been the opposite of this. The first proposed site by the government was more than four hours away by car. Far away from where the family lived, worked and studied.

> "We were living on the other side of the river, so they had options for us. The options that the government provided at the time was not really the types of options that we want. They want us to go to the province; they want to transfer us to another location. Which is far away from what we need" (Michelle).

According to Michelle, if people had not opposed the government's first option they would have been forced to move. Due to the initiative of the community an investigation started, trying to identify unused lots and find better options for the relocation. They found unused land just next to where they were living which became the new site for the families. The relocation was in-city and minimal,

most of the people in the neighbourhood use to live on the other side of the river (located next to the site).

> "So, I'm really overwhelmed because this has proved that the government also need that idea of the people. You need to ask the people what they want; you need to ask the people what they need. Because people in the government are not living by the rivers, so they won't know" (Michelle).

Following this, Michelle points out a strong sense of community in the neighbourhood. She says that one reason for this is that the project started with only one building and people had no choice but to get along. Within the neighbourhood they have a Home Owners Association, even though a fairly new one. They are working to keep the community intact and to make sure that the community is safe and clean. There are cleaning schedules as well as curfew and voluntary guards,

> "We don't need to pay cleaning etc. It should all be us, we should all volunteer (…) There are mutual understanding within the community that we need to obey the rules. Even if you don't like it, it is for the good of everyone. Everyone is in the community, everyone is operating" (Michelle).

Due to initiative of the community, there is a specific structure for every space. Within the area there are many plots for gardening, initiated by the community. Instead or using spare lots for parking etc. they decided to make them useful. Most of the plants in the spare lots are eatable ones, people have their own plot and they are open for everyone's use (see Appendix 1, Picture 1 and 2).

> "If you want to plant, if you have like seeds you can plant them anywhere. You don't even need to ask for permission. If the plants are good for harvesting you can ask the one who planted them if you can have some."

The possibility for the residents to make decisions regarding public spaces goes hand in hand with Arnstein's (1969) ladder. Involving the community in decision-making and thus giving them control over the matter of public space could be resembled with the top step of the ladder (Citizen control). On the other hand, there are yet no playgrounds or sport facilities in Manggahan and it is unclear if there were discussions during the planning process, or if it is the residents themselves that are the only initiators. Regardless, there are possibilities for decisions and change within the community that entail positive outcomes. I argue that participation, in a form that facilitates multiple choices and decision-making, enhances community well being. As noted above, it regards combining different

interests and creating a shared identity where people are able to look above individual interests for the common good of the community.

Some government and NHA projects visited and observed in Manila were not as spacious as Manggahan. These projects did not have spare lots for gardening or similar. The buildings were placed without much additional space in between and there was a lack of public space. In other words, there was not much space for children to play and in many areas children were not allowed to spend time outside for safety reasons. This is not the case in Manggahan. According to Michelle, "it is the opposite here and kids are free to play outside, you know most of the people living in the area." I argue one main reason for this being the residents' participation in the project and self-management.

Continuing along the UN-habitat guidelines it is important to offer the possibilities of extensions of the housing units to the families. This is another way to engage the community in the process and important in order to enhance residents' opportunities. Michelle refers to her unit of today as good enough for a family to live, but that "we're planning on improving the unit definitely, probably in a few months" according to possibilities of finances. The unit is quite small, 28 square meters, with a balcony. There is possible variation of the units; some families put the kitchen on the balcony and many have changed the interior by adding modular cabinets, partitions etc. Hence, the possibilities for families to improve their units are noticeable. On the other hand, I find that it would have been beneficial to have workshops and technical assistance on possible interior changes. Additionally there is a need for further extension possibilities. For example not only improving the existing interior, but also adding extra square meters. But, in Michelle's words, "what is good is that the unit has improved the standard of which people are living in the Philippines".

I argue that there is a relationship between the participatory process within the project and the result of the great sense of community. While planning and then constructing the area, thus constructing a shared identity, the residents were participating and were part of the creation of the identity. Creating a shared meaning of a place or a shared identity - due to the several activities shared from project planning to implementation - will in turn generate feelings of belonging and thus enhance the sense of community.

> "What really touches me is the idea of improving the way of living. Not just providing a house, providing a better community. It has improved the way of living, it has provided us with the idea that if we can have this, we can educate

our children, if our children are educated we can have a better life and our next
generation need not to live near the river" (Michelle).

It should be noted that this is the case for Michelle, but as been discussed
before, residents might have varying meanings and identities in relation to the
place they inhabit. There will thus be multiple and contested identities within the
same area, and residents may have varying feelings in relation to those of
Michelle's. The argument of this paper is that, even though this might be the case,
participatory planning is the approach that best integrates as many of these
identities as possible. Michelle concludes with the following argument,

> "Its really a good community because you are not separated according to your
> capacity of spending. Even if you have a lot, or even if you have less. We are living
> in one community, we are all the same, we are all equals".

There are of course various methods that can be used to achieve or enhance
place identity and belonging. In order to keep up with changes due to
globalization and migration, and creating places for multiple identities it is vital to
include these identities in the actual planning process. One of the main challenges
for urban planning is thus how to include all different opinions and possible
identities. This is of course a great responsibility; not including people could
generate feelings of unbeloning and through this produce possible outsiders. Or in
Christensen's words, "the question of belonging is a strong marker not only of
collective and individual identities but also of distinction and social exclusion"
(2009:26).

While discussing place identity Higgins argues, in line with the above, that
narratives can be exclusionary and that they emphasize control. In relation to
Relph's *placelessness* she argues further that the outsider to a place narrative is
the homogenization that can be brought by globalization. On the other hand,
Higgins argues that there is a risk of homogenization of the counter, a risk of
standard "historical" street furniture, shops, museums etc. Hence, a tension
"created by the diversity of narratives that are likely to exist in any place"
(Higgins, 2005:203).

As a response to this Higgins points out the need for participation, with a focus
on including usually excluded groups. "Community narratives must be listened to
and planners need to think not of place *identity* but of place *identities"*. In line
with Higgins I argue that this might be complicated, but regardless, there is a need

to work with diversity. This must not only set the starting point for the project, but be apparent throughout the development process (Higgins, 2005:203).

As stressed previously the main concern is to include the local residents in the initial stages of a project. It should thus not only be about possible ways to include the residents in the construction, but in the whole process, including everything from data collection to decision-making. In other words, the residents must be a part of the actual creation of a new or changed identity, not merely help with self-construction along the way.

5 The Role of Planners

In line with Hague (2005) I argue that an on-going *partnership* with the residents is the overall most important part of urban planning. In this sense, the urban planner is not designing or constructing the site; he/she is merely a facilitator empowering the local community to improve their environment. In the interview with Michelle, the need for such urban planner became clear,

> ”If a middle man would communicate with the local community and the government we could come up with a better solution instead of just transferring the problem” (Michelle).

This reflects back to the literature review and the need for the planner to have the ability to engage residents in the process. Naturally, the planner has great responsibility when it comes to place identity in relation to future urban development. According to Hague, urban planners have a leading role in the creation and implementation of place narratives. His argument is that "the construction, manipulation, negotiation and implementation of such narratives is an integral part of the role of planners" (Hague, 2005:181), yet again stressing the importance of community participation to create shared narratives. Different memories and meanings collide in places, and an awareness of this is important in order for the practising planner to negotiate new connections (Higgins, 2005:203).

Hague and Jenkins argue that the role of the planner has changed as a result of globalization. Even where there is wider participation in planning, this is often in a controlled context with hidden political or economical aims. Thus they argue that 'glass ceilings' to participation exists and must be challenged. Bottom-up planning will lead to strategic issues, but these should not be put above the 'glass ceiling', but instead negotiated, prompting for a more adaptable planning 'system' and more flexible forms of governance (Hague and Jenkins, 2005:209 and 222). Hague and Jenkins believe that "the fuller recognition of socio-cultural values embedded in place identity and the proactive furtherance of wider participation in planning are essential in all circumstances for planning to continue to evolve". (Hague and Jenkins, 2005:209).

As Hague and Jenkins, I argue the need for a form of planning that focuses on place identity and participation and through this creates the basis for land use planning, rural development and urban design. In order to put these factors in relation to existing political and economic context a wider analysis is required and it is necessary for the planners to step outside their traditional roles. This will in

turn require specific skills in analysis of political and economic tendencies and the limitations it can bring. Thus, new requirements for the planning education become apparent. I argue the need for interdisciplinary studies, or in Hague and Jenkins words, planning education will "need to have a more political economic approach and focus on participation, negotiation and/or mediation as key tools of the planner" (Hague and Jenkins, 2005:223).

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